

"The Essential Force of the Clan": Developing a Collecting-Inspired Ideology of Genealogy through Textual Analysis

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Introduction

THIS ARTICLE BEGAN WITH A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MY WIFE AND ME. We were discussing my research into the popularity of collecting, specifically an article I published in 2002 on why individuals bring items to be appraised at tapings of the popular PBS program, *Antiques Roadshow*. In our attempt to expand the boundaries of ethnographic research, we found that individuals in line at a *Roadshow* taping view the program as a chance to hit the lottery, treat the show's hosts and appraisers like celebrities, and speak with reverence about how the *Roadshow* was an opportunity for "the common man" to enter the sometimes foreboding world of antiques (Bishop).

The individuals we interviewed were most interested, however, in learning the history of their items, even if the historical accounts provided by the *Roadshow* appraisers were punctuated by an assessment of their items' value. This brings me back to my conversation with my wife: Do individuals who take part in genealogical research come to see their work as compiling a collection—in this case, a collection of relatives? This article is my attempt to marry my continuing exploration of collecting behavior with my interest in learning more about why individuals conduct genealogical research.

The popularity of genealogy has increased dramatically in the last decade thanks in large measure to the Internet, which has expedited access to a wide and still expanding range of information. Rootsweb.

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com and Genealogy.com are two of the world's most frequently visited Web sites. The National Genealogical Society (NGS) estimates that only gardening is more popular with hobbyists (Seabrook). The Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints operate familysearch.org, perhaps the most comprehensive genealogical database in the world. The site, which receives more than eight million hits per day, includes a database that now includes approximately one billion names (Kilborn).

To date, however, little research has been done on the cultural meaning of genealogy. This article is a first step in that direction. I use textual analysis to cobble together an ideology of genealogy from news accounts of individuals engaged in genealogical research. I attempt to answer several research questions: Do journalists who write about genealogy liken the act of genealogical research to collecting? Do individuals describe researched ancestors as if they were part of a collection? Is it fair to compare descriptions given by people about their ancestors with descriptions of the things that they own? Does the ideology of genealogical research revolve around the notion that, as some suggest, researchers are only after status?

Review of the Literature

I begin with a brief discussion of the literature on collecting. More than 20 million of us collect something (Milford). Baby boomers, many motivated by the desire to learn or confirm the history of their collections and armed with large amounts of disposable income, have fueled this recent surge. Television programs about collecting, most notably *The Antiques Roadshow* and A&E's *The Incurable Collector* are popular; in fact, the *Roadshow* is PBS's most highly rated program. As I have argued elsewhere (Bishop), these programs are only the most visible representation of our fascination with collecting.

There are deeper reasons that we are becoming our collections, as Jean Baudrillard contends. We collect to reconnect to the past, to "divinity, to nature, to primitive knowledge," he argues (76). Collectibles represent "absolute reality" and "symbolize an inward transcendence, that phantasy of a centre-point in reality which nourishes all mythological consciousness, all individual consciousness—that phantasy whereby a projected detail comes to stand for the ego, and the rest of the world is then organized around it" (79). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton contend that items in a collection "express dynamic

processes within people, among people, and between people and the total environment" (43). The self is a reflection of the things with which we interact. Things "embody goals, make skills manifest, and shape the identities of their users" (2). Our things are tools for reflection. It would be impossible to try and make sense of "all the feelings, memories, and thoughts that constitute what one is" (2); to facilitate this task, we use "representations that stand for the vast range of experiences that make up and shape the self" (2). We attend to information—or an item—purposively, selecting it from all available information. "When attending to something, we do so in order to realize some intention," Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton argue (5). Social systems are built on these "structures of attention," only they are shared among the members of the system.

Collectors make up one such system. The goals of the group shape the selves of those who make up the system, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton contend. Of particular importance to this research is their notion that an object becomes "charged" when we invest our psychic energy in it. Such an investment comes with a cost; we lose part of our ability "to experience the world, to process information, to pursue goals" by investing energy in an object "to the exclusion of other possibilities" (8).

Baudrillard argues that the investment consumes us. Objects come to have two functions: "to be put to use and to be possessed" (86). If an item no longer has a function, or use value, it "takes on a strictly subjective status: it becomes part of a collection" (86). In the end, all objects are roughly the same. This is a problem for collectors: they seek items for their collection knowing that there is a nearly endless string of items left to collect. The only satisfaction comes from collecting more—the "hunt," as collectors call it. An item is not fully realized until it is part of a collection. To remain empowered, collectors must, in essence, "reacquire" the items; the solidity of the item—its history, the sentimental narrative behind its acquisition—is left to "dissolve in the presence of the newly acquired weight of the characteristics the commodity shares with other goods" (70). A Marxist might argue that the use value of a collectible has disappeared, leaving behind only its exchange value. The items are converted into signs of their use, "divorced from physical needs," as Best and Kellner claim (11). The item no longer has a core set of traits; instead, it is defined fluidly, according to the needs and desires of a collector.

Clusters of collectors become "centers of accumulated energy," according to Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (35). Collectors are carried away by the "essential force of the clan" (35), a force that gives them their sense of purpose. They differentiate themselves, rather than integrating themselves and their passion, threatening the links between the self and the "vast purposes of the environment" (35), as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton contend. They pursue control and sustain connectedness with the collecting community "at the expense of relatedness with other purposes" (39).

Genealogy

Despite the popularity of genealogy, a satisfactory history of the field has yet to be written, claim Taylor and Crandall. They offer three reasons: genealogical research is too personal, its methodology is too straightforward, and the field, when the authors wrote their book on genealogy, lacked professional oversight. Further, scholars often dismiss genealogy as an "amateurish pastime" (4). The first genealogical account was published in 1771, but genealogical research did not become popular until the middle of the nineteenth century (3). Taylor and Crandall contend that the colonists' victory in the Revolutionary War discouraged some from trying to learn more about their ancestors. Such activity was seen "as a means to establish privilege by descent" (5). Further, Americans were too busy building a new nation to be caught up in genealogical research. Still, citizens were anxious to set themselves apart from others; genealogy offered a means to do that. "The implicit goal of realizing social distance could be carried out by attesting to an illustrious bloodline in the guise of family pride," Taylor and Crandall note. Social climbing soon became a popular pastime. The more affluent we became, the more we tried to hide our "ignoble origins" by seeking "social and cultural certification from Europe" (5).

The number of genealogical researchers grew significantly between the Civil War and World War I. Genealogical societies were launched in a number of states, an expansion that culminated in the formation in 1903 of the National Genealogical Society (NGS). Membership in these societies grew, as did the number of genealogies on the shelves of America's libraries (Taylor and Crandall 7). Americans were spending more of their growing leisure time and wealth trying to establish links with wealthy and powerful ancestors. It was becoming rare to find a

family that did not "boast its pedigree and escutcheon" (7). Americans were also, for the first time, fascinated with their nation's history; they were in a "retrospective mood." The "social fissures and psychic wounds" caused by the Civil War, combined with the nation's centennial in 1876, "served to remind persons of whose shoulders they stood on and whose dreams they aspired to fulfill" (8).

World War I saw genealogy's popularity wane; it rebounded in the years after the war, as families struggled to learn more about loved ones lost in battle. Society membership fell off in the years after the war, but a growing range of resources "brought genealogy within reach of more and more persons" (Taylor and Crandall 12). Improvements in instruction and professionalization buoyed genealogists after World War II. In 1950, the National Archives and American University organized the Institute for Genealogical Research, a three-week training course for aspiring genealogists (14). Fourteen years later, the NGS and the American Society of Genealogists established the Board for Certification of Genealogists. Publication of Alex Haley's *Roots* in 1976 propelled the popularity of genealogy to new heights. More than 500,000 people in the United States and Canada were engaged in regular genealogical research (14). The growing range of research tools available on the Internet has stimulated another powerful wave of interest in genealogy.

Having briefly explored the history of genealogy, let us turn to a deeper discussion of the nature of genealogical research and writing. I borrow, perhaps liberally, from philosopher Martin Saar's discussion of genealogical criticism. Saar argues that genealogy is a "way of writing history"; a genealogical account "historicizes things that had no significant history before" (232). Names and accounts discovered by researchers achieve historical value only when they are incorporated into a broader genealogical account. Absent that action, they remain unrelated, undiscovered facts that have not yet been transformed, through the act of genealogical research, into relevant pieces of information.

Saar would argue that the "field of the historical"—in these cases, the families studied by genealogists—is "expanded" through research and writing. Every new discovery revises a family's history. Historicization has impact, he claims, "when it turns to objects whose meaning and validity is affected by revealing their historicity" (233). Put more simply, the people, places, and events revealed through genealogy "shape and structure the ways in which individuals understand and

express themselves, relate to themselves, but also how they can be seen, described, and counted on by others." Genealogy can only be done on oneself, one's family. It is a story, Saar argues, of how outside forces shape an individual it is the story of one's "own becoming" (236).

These stories, Saar writes, are typically propelled by several characteristics. First, genealogy is "highly rhetorical and irreducibly hyperbolic" (238). The impact of a genealogical account is drawn from "the dramatizing gesture, from the alarming and overpowering representation of power." Among the most significant rhetorical devices seen in genealogies are hyperbole, "theatrical effect," an emphasis on process, and "the construction of broad historical lines and developments" around "paradigmatic moments" carefully selected by the author. Saar also contends that the reader is at the same time the subject and object of a genealogy. The reader is affected by the genealogical account as he or she is being addressed by it. In short, "the story is told to the one (the subject) that it is about" (Saar 239). In aiming at the audience, the genealogist "supposes that they are hit, affected and concerned by historical account, that they are provoked and shocked, struck by the lightning of instantaneous insight into what they are, how they have become and what they might not want to be" (240). The author of a genealogy succeeds when their work causes a reader to go off and begin creating a version of his or her "becoming."

Method

My research focuses not on how genealogical research is conducted, but on the "preferred reading" of genealogy that emerges from news media coverage. I conducted a textual analysis of newspaper and magazine articles and broadcast news transcripts on genealogy that appeared in 2001 (twenty-four articles, two transcripts) and 2002 (eighteen articles, two transcripts). Articles were obtained using the Lexis-Nexis database. I excluded recurring features and columns on genealogy from the analysis. I focused on the portrayals of the genealogical researcher, not the opinion or advice about genealogical research offered by a reporter or columnist.

Masterman contends that "breaking through" a text allows the researcher to probe "the rhetorical techniques through which meanings are produced" (127). Lule notes that textual analysis is an effective tool for the researcher who seeks to explore "*how* stereotypical depictions are

invoked through the language and conventions of the press" (177). Stuart Hall contends that it is "more useful" than content analysis "in penetrating the latent meanings of a text" and that it preserves "something of the complexity of language and connotation which has to be sacrificed in content analysis in order to achieve high validation" ("Introduction" 307).

To write an effective textual analysis, the researcher "work[s] back through the narrative elements of form, rhetoric, and style to uncover the underlying social and historical processes" and "the metalanguage that guided its production" (Roy 318). The researcher pays special attention to the "visual, verbal, rhetorical, and presentational codes that media employ to make a story eventful" (318). Through this textual analysis, an ideology of genealogy will begin to emerge. Hall defines ideology as "the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works" ("Ideology" 307). Certain ideologies become dominant to the exclusion of ideologies that present alternative perspectives. One way of "seeing the world" achieves hegemony, a "condition in process" that enables dominant institutions to exercise "moral and intellectual leadership" (Storey 124).

Ideology enables powerful groups to exercise control over individuals through what Sonja Foss refers to as "symbolic coercion" (294). A dominant ideology, contends Foss, "controls what participants see as natural or obvious by establishing the norm" (295). Those subordinate to the dominant institutions "appear to support and subscribe to values, ideals, objectives, cultural and political meanings which bind them to, and 'incorporate' them into, the prevailing structures of power" (124). A process of continual negotiation and concession to subordinate groups maintains hegemony. In exploring a text, then, we are not so much concerned with the "conflict between competing systems of meaning" as we are with the "power of a particular system to represent its own representations as a direct reflection of the real, to produce its own meanings as experience" (Grossberg 145). Thus, my focus is not the amount or quality of information about genealogy offered in these articles, but rather how we are "given access to that knowledge, and subsequently empowered or de-powered" (146). Access to the knowledge contained in these news articles is provided via several significant themes. I will discuss each of them in turn.

A Quest For Identity

Journalists tell us that individuals begin genealogical research to find out who they are, as if it is the most significant means for achieving such insight. For James Beidler, executive director of the Genealogy Society of Philadelphia, genealogy is "a quest for identity, pure and simple" (Pitz B-1). Avid collectors embark on similar quests, argues Baudrillard. The quest often takes them to their ancestral homelands. Genealogists of all skill levels try "to put flesh on the bones of a pedigree through researching" (Pitz B-1). They interact with their ancestors. Their identities are a reflection of the information they discover, much as the identity of a collector is a reflection of the items that he or she collects, as Baudrillard claims. As one learns more about one's ancestors, "you feel to some degree, you're learning about yourself." Genealogists "want to know where they sprouted from" (Byrd 3-J).

A researcher told NBC's Maria Shriver that her work "has made me more of a complete person. I'm closer to my family" ("More People Searching"). In their pursuit of this knowledge, they are biographers, not just collectors of information. "This is what we encourage genealogists to do today, not to be ancestor collectors, but to compile biographies of your ancestors," Beidler argues (Pitz B-1). Beidler's comment is the only direct mention of collecting found in the stories analyzed for this article. Still, one researcher told Williams that the thrill of genealogy is that "every new finding opens the door to another layer of research" (1-B). He said he loved the "the constant hunt for new information. You never really know what you're going to find" (1-B). The genealogical researcher assembles facts that come to represent his or her range of experiences. Collectors pursue and purchase items that function similarly. It is an interpretation of history, not an accurate account of history. Thus, just as a collector "becomes" a collection, the genealogical researcher "becomes" the story of his or her own "becoming," as Saar might argue.

"Families are on the move so much, and people want to find their roots," said one genealogist (Jaunet 1). The frantic pace of life "has caused a counter movement in people to slow down and think about family history," wrote Henderson (7). Fascination with our ancestors springs directly from the fact that we live in a disposable society, wrote Seabrook. "Everything gets thrown out or torn down too fast, until all we've got left is our genes" (58). Our overreliance on electronic devices,

suggest journalists, also motivates researchers to compile family histories. "[T]hey want something solid and substantial; that you can hold in your hand, that you can give to your children and grandchildren," said a researcher in a story by Wiltenburg (16).

According to the development director for the San Antonio Public Library Foundation, "understanding your past helps you comprehend who you are, why your parents are the way they are or were, and what in their background shaped your feelings and your identity" (Schement 6-H). A St. Louis resident told a reporter that it was important to him "to know what my antecedents did, what kind of people they were, and what kind of life they had" (Billhartz E-2). Genealogists seek "a personal relationship with history," one genealogist explained. "You see all the timelines in history, and this puts me into the timelines" (Lepper NI-6). The often exorbitant cost of the quest—for materials, courses, travel, and conventions held by genealogy organizations—is clearly worth it, journalists suggest, if a researcher can form connections with his or her past. "The payoff for me is knowing what my history is," a researcher told Williams (1-B).

The Right Tools for the Job

The Internet has dramatically simplified the genealogist's task, with advances coming at a rapid pace. Duryee writes about the National Archives releasing "a tidal wave of new facts" (B-1) in the form of previously sealed census data. Genealogists "traded a good night's sleep in order to get a look at" the data as soon as it was available ("National Archives Releases"). This is the improved "fuel" that propels genealogists in their "quest for ancestors" (Pitz B-1). Information about ancestors is "just keystrokes away," wrote Baber (17). The Internet is "tailor-made for genealogical research" (17).

Technological advances have also contributed to the rise in genealogy's popularity. In the lead paragraph of a story about a new Ellis Island database, a reporter noted that the site "was more popular in its first week than Britney Spears, Pokemon, and *Survivor*" (Saul 34). The "gargantuan demand" for the information on the site did not surprise the site's creators. Journalists wonder in their stories how genealogists completed their research without these tools. "There has never been a better time to research ancestors than now," wrote Veach (12). Without them, research was slow and complicated. Records of the Freedmen's

Bank had been stored in the National Archives. They were "difficult to use because they lacked effective indexes," according to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* ("Bank Record CD" A-5). A new CD-ROM containing these records gives researchers "instant access to information that might have taken years of research to find" (A-5).

Journalists write with great admiration about these changes. A number of the stories explored in this analysis (e.g., "Bank Record CD") discuss in glowing terms the release of a new piece of software or the creation of a new online genealogical database. A researcher interviewed by Duryee expressed her delight at using newly released census data as if she were a collector who had just located a long sought after item: "I'm the first person to use it" (B-1). Researchers attending the annual NGS conference gladly "opened their wallets for the latest high-tech research gimmicks" (Williams 1-B).

Genealogists now seem so consumed by these advances that they soon will be unable to imagine how research was done without them. To paraphrase Sven Birkerts, genealogists will be unable to assess the impact of technology on their craft because they will lack "an independent ledge" (119) from which to begin such an assessment. Journalists embrace the changes embraced by genealogists, but it seems reasonable to argue that these tools are doing away with, again borrowing from Birkerts, a "pre-Internet" past in genealogical research. Genealogists seem more interested in accumulating and disseminating the information they gather rather than truly experiencing the connections it brings.

Still, these advances have enabled genealogists to "cover great distances and conduct in-depth investigations for a fraction of the cost of a traditional research trip" (Veach 12). In the past, journalists suggest, genealogists were limited to asking family members for information. "It was complicated and slow to track your ancestry," a librarian told Baber (17). Armed with a laptop and the Internet, a researcher can "encounter famous or infamous people in your family that you might not have otherwise known were related to you" (17). Journalists never explore how this loss of personal contact affects the act of genealogical research or the researchers themselves. Instead, they applaud the inventiveness of those who develop the technological advances, and the genealogists for making research so much easier for the rest of us.

Postman would note that the ease with which researchers can now obtain information is another example of how use of information has

"rejected the necessity of interconnectedness, proceeded without context, argued for instancy against historical continuity, and offered fascination in place of complexity and coherence" (69). Genealogists are interested more in self-exploration, Saar would argue, not in objectively mapping the context in which their histories occur. These new tools are just right for the job.

Not for the Faint of Heart

The advent and availability of these tools have also accelerated the professionalization of genealogy. It is not, one journalist wrote, "for the faint of heart" (Daniels NC-10). Genealogy should not be engaged in casually, nor without first mastering these new tools. One should not approach genealogy like the cousin of a man interviewed by Campbell (1-E), "one of those happy amateur fishermen who don't care whether they catch a fish or not." The popularity of Web sites like familysearch.org entices more people to become involved in genealogical research, democratizing it, in a sense. But at the same time, these sites erect and sustain new conditions for entry. Now, not just anybody can do it—or do it well. Skills must be mastered, professional boundaries maintained.

Genealogists try to, as Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton would argue, differentiate themselves from the casual researcher and from those who do not research their ancestors. Through professionalization, genealogists, at least those interviewed by these journalists, can strengthen "the essential force of the clan." Journalists assist genealogists by writing so frequently about how to get started doing genealogical research—about beginners and advanced classes in genealogy (Craven NC-4), for example, given to encourage adults and children to begin the research quest. The president of a California genealogical society said that it is important to "start kids early" and encourage them "to ask questions now while they are young and most likely still have extended family members" (NC-4).

The Ohio Historical Society instructs children to create a "History of Me" memory book" filled with family artifacts. Questions for the children to ask of family members come from a Society program. "Once they start asking those questions," said a staffer quoted by Lemmon, "we hope more questions will come up" (3). The researchers interviewed by Nissman (45) urged young genealogists to use photos to persuade older family members to talk about the past and ask open-

ended questions. Tomlinson suggests not wasting the time of people living in ancestral lands with an amateurish approach. Genealogists are now supposed to be experts: "Once you know the town and the location of its records, write or call to make sure they have records for the time period you are interested in" (M-8). Genealogy has become so professionalized, wrote one reporter, that the field now has its own merchandise—"pens, shot glasses, travel mugs, and other items" (Williams 1-B). Said one researcher, "there was nothing out there for us" (1-B).

Only with mastery can genealogists adequately play their role as experts—as the "go-to" people for community history. Thus, these stories help genealogists create and sustain professional boundaries. Boundary-work rhetoric, as described by sociologist Thomas Gieryn, is crafted "when boundaries are threatened, expanded, constricted, and refined" (qtd. in Winch 23). Boundaries enable members of a profession to exert "epistemic authority" (Gieryn 24), and, more pragmatically, to exclude those who claim to provide the same service. Here, news coverage of genealogy gives professional researchers the opportunity to set the terms of entry for the field. As Gieryn notes, the news media offers "ripe spots for picking juicy episodes of cultural cartography" (24). Amateur researchers sit on the other side of the boundary, encouraged by more accomplished genealogists to master the tools of the trade. In a friendly, firm way, genealogists "deny expertise, authority . . . and material resources to potentially competitive outsiders" (qtd. in Winch 17)—that is, until the amateur learns to use the growing range of tools at his or her disposal and is deemed ready to join the ranks of professional genealogists.

One researcher volunteered to compile a guide to the 1890 New York police census and a list of Tampa Bay census films. The researcher then set himself apart: "Even the librarians didn't know what all was out there," he said (Allen 2-D). It was as if he were an appraiser, filling these professionals in on the value of this information. The St. Louis County Library benefited from the expertise—and largesse—of genealogists when, in 2001, it received a nearly century-old genealogy collection from NGS. "It's more resources and much broader than what we have had," said a county librarian (Little 3). The library's past work with NGS helped close the deal, Little wrote. NGS board members had made use of the county collection. "They know how good our website is," the librarian wrote (3).

Journalists suggest that genealogists see themselves not only as storytellers, but also as experts spreading the gospel of reconstructing

history. The Ohio Genealogical Society (Moulton 3-G) compiled a registry of the state's more than 13,000 known burial sites. One genealogist was referred to as the "honorary town historian" (Kocian 1). But the "essential force of the clan" keeps them together. Craven describes a meeting of the North San Diego County Genealogical Society as being "for people who care about the field and want to commiserate with other genealogy lovers" (NC-4). Experts need their own place to work. The Smyrna Public Library in Georgia in 2002 opened a room dedicated to genealogical research. The room contains the library's more than 2,000 volumes of genealogical records and a complete collection of Georgia census data. "The completed room emits a distinct air of historic research," wrote Taylor (1-JF).

Storytelling as Mission

Genealogists feel an intense desire to tell the stories they piece together through research. Dissemination is perhaps the most important part of the genealogical quest. Playing the role of storyteller sustains them. Compiling lists of names is not enough for the genealogist, journalists suggest. Just acquiring items is not enough for a collector. Collectors are interested in the history of an item and integrate that information into a broader narrative that revolves around their collection, just as a genealogist weaves a family narrative. "It's social history," said one genealogist interviewed by Wiltenburg. "They're looking for interesting stories. They're looking for connections with the past" (16). They see the compilation of narrative—the story of their "own becoming," as Saar would argue—as their mission. A volunteer at a Louisiana library spoke proudly about his work transcribing birth and death certificate indices for the Internet. He was part of a "brigade of 70 hobby genealogists" (LaFrance 1) engaged in "painstaking work" to make finding this information easier for genealogists. Several researchers contacted the volunteer to thank him for his work. "That is really the rewarding part, either finding my own or someone else's folks," he said (1). Journalists suggest that researchers should thank these volunteers: "There is no Genealogy Fairy. Like most databases, they were created by volunteers who believe that all of us engaged in this addictive avocation should repay the favors done for us" (Allen 2-D).

Journalists ask genealogists to reveal this passion for storytelling in compiling news stories about them. LaFrance ("Genealogy Technology")

wrote about a woman who quit her job with a major computer company to research and write genealogical stories after her research revealed a bill of sale for members of her family, who were sold into slavery in Louisiana in the mid-nineteenth century. The discovery "filled her with a new determination to tell their stories" (1). Nearly every family, Seabrook wrote, can tell a story about how their ancestors came to the United States. "Crossing stories" reveal how these individuals began to build lives as Americans. They are "sources of pride"; they lay the foundation, Seabrook argued, "for a kind of spiritual pedigree" (58). The story is something to share with future generations—"a tremendous gift to pass on to the family," said one researcher (McGraw E-4).

The stories do not necessarily have to revolve around wealth or status, write journalists, but they at least have to be interesting. Pitz writes about how a genealogist's father teased her when she began her research. "Maybe you're a daughter of the American Revolution," he said (B-1). His daughter discovered that the first member of her family to come to America had indeed fought in the Revolutionary War. Nevertheless, the woman told Pitz that she would rather learn more about her ancestors than join the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Thus, the stories are the "fun stuff" drawn from genealogy, as one reporter wrote ("Author to Talk" 8). Only "interesting people," it seems, are included. "If you're worried about scandals in the family," said a genealogy instructor interviewed by Daniels, "quit now. There isn't a family living that doesn't have a horse thief, an illegitimate child, or someone who went to jail" (NC-10). Even researchers who craft genealogies of their homes are disappointed when their homes are "just plain boring" (Collins 6). Most researchers "love to find out their house was a brothel. They rarely were," said a house genealogist (6).

Saar's work on genealogical criticism suggests that the exploits of ancestors (or a home's previous occupants) are "paradigmatic moments" that propel a genealogical account. These moments have impact, at least initially, only to those who unearth and piece them together. Nor do the stories have to be accurate. In fact, genealogists seem to prefer a fictional quality in their stories: "I picture them in the old country, maybe a farmer. . . . It makes me feel good that we haven't forgotten them," said a researcher interviewed by McGraw (E-4). Seabrook noted that the crossing stories he researched "are rarely written down" and that they take the form of "oral legends" driven more by a compelling narrative than by accuracy (58). A genealogist has to become "a combo

of a diplomat, researcher, and stenographer" in order to make sense of the "battling discussions" in which families engage when talking about their history (Nissman 45).

A Hobby, An Avocation, An Obsession

Journalists describe genealogy as an obsession. It is "a hobby, then it's an avocation, then it's an obsession," said one genealogist (Daniels NC-10). A neighbor coerced a retired aeronautical engineer to take a genealogy class: "I was kind of interested in family history. I've got four kids . . . I wanted to learn along with him. Now I'm hooked" (McGraw E-4). A *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* reporter described a Chicago man's lifelong quest, "crisscrossing the country and investing thousands of dollars researching his heritage in Italy and elsewhere" (Williams 1-B). Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton might argue that genealogists have "charged" the information they seek so fervently with a tremendous amount of "psychic energy." Discoveries "keep them going despite tedious record searches and blind alleys" (Shute 77).

Gaining or obtaining a new block of information is described as a "coup" and a "public service" (Schement 6-H). Even though many researchers work for the benefit of others, analysis of these stories reveals that genealogy is, at times at least, a lonely pursuit. Researchers, like zealous collectors, have lost some of their ability "to experience the world" beyond the history they work so diligently to construct. Thorough researchers "keep a pencil and paper by our beds at night in case we dream of a clue" (6-H). Allen wrote with admiration about a genealogist's ability to multitask: "he hunts tombstones while tracking deer" (2-D). He "compiles the data, complete with directions for locating the sites, and e-mails it" to a volunteer indexer who places the information on a state-run Web site (2-D). Casual researchers rarely show such dedication, journalists suggest.

One researcher left her job to pursue genealogical research ("Author Traces Family History"). She locked herself in her house as part of her pursuit, which eventually produced a popular historical novel about her family. "I wasn't fit company, and I was angry, and I was exhilarated, and I was proud, and I was depressed, and I went through every emotion that you can conceive of," she told CNN. Brice quoted a researcher as saying, "the hunt may be habit-forming. . . . Most of us who do genealogy used to do something else" (1-JQ).

Each new fact, each new relative heightens the passion. A genealogist described the elation felt by fellow members of a genealogy class: "I'm used to hearing the screams. It means someone has just found a relative they've been looking for, sometimes for years" (McGraw E-4). The former computer scientist (LaFrance, "Creole Roots") said that she had for decades taken a less-than-serious approach to her research. "It was just casual mulling over," she said. As she completed more research, she became "obsessed with finding every possible branch of the family" (1). The pursuit is often compared to solving a mystery (Newbart) or a puzzle (Campbell; Daniels; Wiltenburg)—a "giant jigsaw puzzle," according to one researcher ("More People Searching"), one that has no solution. "Every time I think I'm getting close to putting the pieces together, I find new pieces," said the same researcher.

Saar might argue that the "puzzle" involves historicizing "pieces" in order to put together a more compelling history of a family or region. Karkabi interviewed Bruno Wolf, an ancestor of General Blas de la Garza Falcon. Wolf donated more than 1,000 documents pertaining to the general to a Texas university. The value of the documents, which include correspondence between the general and the government of Spain, is that it will enable historians and genealogists to "rewrite the history of South Texas" (1). Thus, the story of this family's "becoming," as Saar would suggest, is a key contribution to the recrafting of a region's "becoming." Genealogists work feverishly to craft stories that last. "You can always leave your family money and possessions, but those things don't stay around. This will stay; this is very valuable," said one genealogist about her family history (McGraw E-4).

Conclusions

Collecting, genealogy, and journalism are similar in that each revolves around accumulating information and using it to craft and revise narratives—about items in a collection, members of one's family, facts surrounding an event—that sustain a sense of identity and that sometimes have only a tenuous connection to reality. Thus, it is appropriate to use ideas about collecting to explore how the ideology of genealogy emerges from news media coverage. Journalism is often called "history in a hurry." Reporters seek "the best available version of the truth," claims famed reporter Bob Woodward. They endeavor to craft accurate, compelling narratives from information that they work to uncover.

Genealogy, as seen through the work of these reporters, amounts to recapturing and rewriting "in a hurry" the history of a researcher's family based on pieces of information sought after and selected by the genealogist for its narrative power.

Genealogy's most important function, write reporters, is to enable family members to pass along coherent, compelling family histories to their children. Finally, items in a collection, argue Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, come to stand for "the vast range of experiences that make up and shape the self" (5). The items in a collection are narrative touchstones—each carries with it a story about its acquisition and importance.

A key narrative strand that emerges from coverage of genealogy is the Internet, enabling genealogists to recapture and rewrite at an even faster pace. Reporters write admiringly about the lengths to which genealogists go to uncover information about their families. They focus on the zeal with which genealogists go about their work. But like journalism, genealogy provides an incomplete picture of history. As Saar would argue, certain facts are historicized—given historical value through the act of research—but others are left by the wayside. Thus, genealogists, like journalists, are gatekeepers, selecting and discarding pieces of information based on what they believe their audience—for journalists, the reader; for genealogists, members of their family—wants.

Journalists write about genealogy as a lonely quest for researchers seeking to redefine themselves. Researchers follow separate paths, stopping only to share tips and information with individuals who are embarking on their own journeys of self-discovery. Armed with a growing range of new tools, genealogists approach what for many is a hobby with the zeal and dedication of a professional. These characteristics are vital if accurate, enduring stories are to be disseminated. But these stories fail to contextualize the facts discovered by the genealogist, a charge frequently made in reference to the work of reporters. As Saar explains, a family history "can only be given of your own culture, your milieu, your family, your genus" (236).

Thus, genealogical research is, at its core, self-exploration, an attempt to redefine oneself, an assertion supported by the work of reporters. Like collectors, genealogists differentiate themselves, empowered by "the essential force of the clan." Still, genealogists are driven by the desire to teach. Similarly, the true collector is a teacher who uses the collection as a vehicle to share with others knowledge

about the items and their history. Like the genealogist, they relish the expert's role, a role that journalists are trained to reject.

Finally, journalists provide the stage for skilled genealogists to tell their stories and also to engage in boundary work rhetoric that addresses the lack of professional oversight cited by critics of the field (Taylor and Crandall). Ironically, many (e.g., Zelizer) have criticized journalists for being too insular and for insisting that news organizations be allowed to police themselves. These descriptions of genealogy reflect a growing demand for the services offered by genealogists who have mastered what they have deemed the necessary skills. Stories describe attempts by professional genealogists to demarcate, in a friendly manner, between their work and the work done by amateurs. Hobbyists are not excluded, as Gieryn suggests in his work on professional boundary building; instead, they are gently reminded of their status as apprentices. They must partake of the instruction offered by professionals before they can be officially admitted to the profession. Thus, the final ideological strand taken from these articles is that they amount to a slight but significant redrawing of the "cultural map" (Gieryn 17) of genealogy by practitioners who have seen a growing number of potential competitors enter their field. They simply wish to reinforce their professional boundaries.

These articles give readers the chance to watch an internal credibility contest, as Gieryn would argue—an attempt by professional genealogists, playing the role of "cultural cartographer" (23), to protect their autonomy. By writing more about the popularity of genealogy, journalists are also redrawing our cultural map, albeit on a broader scale. The map now includes and reflects our growing interest in genealogy. More interest in genealogy makes it more newsworthy. As a result, journalists cover genealogy more often. More interest also means more competitors—and, potentially, more apprentices for skilled genealogists.

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